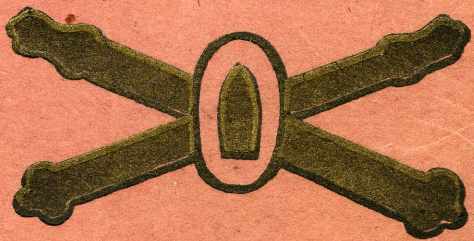


125



AAA
Gun Battalion



125

AAA

GUN BATTALION

MOBILE

A STRAIGHT SHOOTING OUTFIT

THE HISTORY
OF ITS TRAINING, TRAVELS
AND ACHIEVEMENTS



THE RACKETEER.

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PHOTOGRAPHER — Jan Sturm (Roosendaal, Holland)

PRINTER — Joseph Van In & C^o, Lier, Belgium

THE BATTALION COMMANDER.

To The Officers and Men, 125th AAA Gun Bn :

One full year ago I was assigned to command the 125th AAA Gun Bn. On that day you were staging at Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, for overseas shipment. A few weeks later in Southern England you were making history by your remarkable destruction of Hitler's V1's. Events have moved rapidly since then. I do not here intend to write many words eulogizing your successes. I shall let your record of 750 V1 kills speak for itself, but I do want you to know that I consider it a very great privilege to command this unit of splendid young American officers and men.

Every enlisted man in our army is deserving of very real leadership. I hope and trust that you men may entertain the thought that your officers have fulfilled this solemn obligation towards you. The officers and men of this unit have not yet failed me, and I have seen some of you work until you fell from exhaustion.

As long as I live I shall remember your superb conduct in combat, particularly so during « The Battle of the Bulge ». You took up anti tank positions at open road junctions only a few miles ahead of von Rundstedt's armies, with nothing between you and these advancing hordes but the Meuse river and the Grace of God, and you were ordered not to abandon these positions at any cost. The rapid and thorough manner in which you went into action; your high morale and attention to duty, after our great tragedy in Leige, Belgium, were indeed magnificent.

You have formed a part of a great Army. Remember how sweet to one's ears sounded the din of Third Armored Division when it moved in around us « in the bulge »? The arrival of the intent and silent doughs of the 75th and 84th Infantry Divisions were, indeed, reassuring to us at this same dramatic moment. You, I know, are anxious to give all credit to « The Combined Arms ».

I do not know where you shall journey from your present station in Holland. However, I am certain that whatever task you may receive that you will carry out the assignment in your usual fine manner. I have often heard this expression : « A Battalion Commander has the finest job in the Army. » I do sincerely believe, after having served one full year with you, that this statement is true. I am proud of the 125th Battalion — and that means that I am proud of you — because you are the battalion.

JAMES D. LAND
Lt Col, 125th AAA Gun Bn
Commanding.

TOMORROW.

Whatever tomorrow holds in store for mankind depends upon his relationship to the Supreme Ruler of Heaven and Earth. The future, as in the past, will be governed by this inescapable fact. Man can neither avoid nor change certain immutable laws which have existed from the dawn of time. A brief survey of history, sacred or secular, reveals the inevitable consequences of right or wrong. So long as man walked the straight and narrow path he prospered. But when he violated the basic laws of life, his foot steps led to sorrow and disaster. The fall of the Roman Empire is proof of this. But what of a hundred other Empires whose proud reigns crumbled because of internal decay? «The Law of the Medes and Persians which altereth not», the mighty Empire of Charles the Fifth, and Famed Babylon, all succumbed to the folly of their own making.

But we need not borrow of the past. Today shall remain as an eternal indictment of all who assume to deny God His rightful place in life. Germany will be thought of as a Nero who burned Rome, or a Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ. Yet it was in this very land where a prophet arose who wrote «The Decline of Civilization!» Unfortunately a little man who thought only in terms of greed and personal glory could not see the hand writing on the wall. The rights and happiness of others was not considered. Nothing must thwart the vain ambitions of this petty assassin who violated every principle sacred to man. He was not guilty alone but enjoyed the support of his own people who dreamed in terms of World Empire. The things which belong to the Spirit were held second place to the materialistic universe. Personality was not respected. Others simply existed for exploitation. No evil was too great or crime too nauseating for these self styled «supermen!» The wildest fancy of propaganda could never do justice to the cold hard facts of their perfidy.

The battle of cannon has nearly ended. The real battle is yet ahead. Victory depends not so much on defeated armies but in our ability to transform lives and minds, twisted by a fanatical Nazi philosophy, into a Christ like society. «Not by might but by my Spirit saith the Lord» is still the final word. The fondest hope of Tomorrow is a World blessed by a universal Brotherhood in which freedom, justice, and truth prevails.

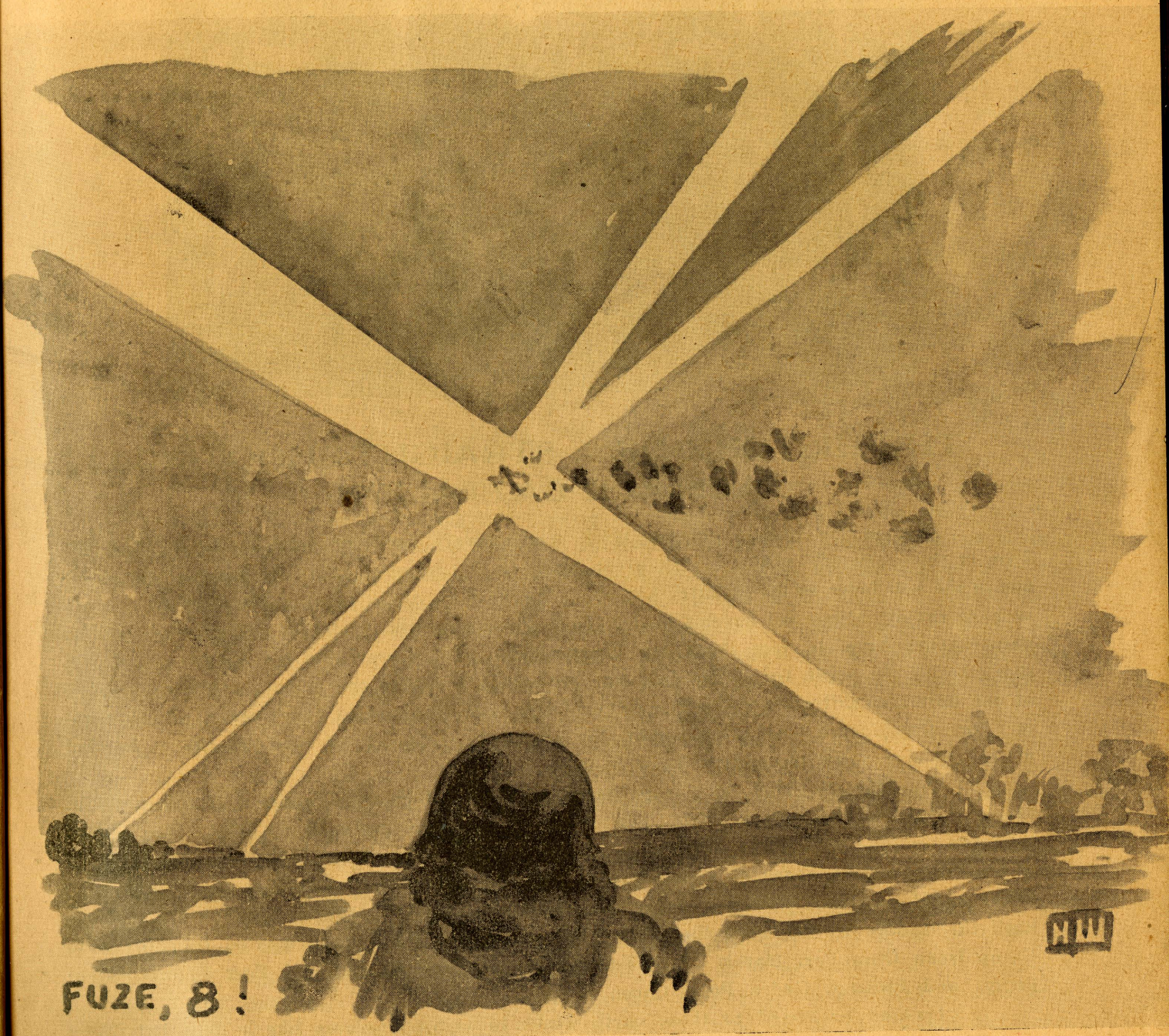
Christ offers that one hope. For two thousand years organized Christianity has never gone all out for Him. Plenty have been the Creeds, official documents, and public confessions. How true the words, «This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me!»

Tomorrow can be a happier day, free from the tragedy of this moment, if Christ is supreme in your heart and mine.

«God be in my head and in my understanding;
God be in mine eyes and in my looking;
God be in my mouth and in my speaking;
God be in my heart and in my thinking;
God be in mine all 'till my departing.»

Sarum Primer (1858)

Chaplain OLIVER D. COBLE



FUZE, 8!

NW



THE HISTORY OF A STRAIGHT-SHOOTING ACK-ACK BATTALION.

This is the history of the 125th Anti-aircraft Artillery Gun Battalion (Mobile). This is the story of an outfit with great pride in its achievements. We haven't slugged it out in the hell holes as the infantry has done. We haven't made great raids over the enemy as have the air corps. We haven't leaped from planes into the midst of enemy nests as the paratroopers have. In fact there are many things in this war that we haven't done. But that's beside the point, for as the following account will testify, the achievements and record of our battalion will go down as the story of the men who fought the weapon of the future : the flying-death, the robot bomb. We accepted our task; we met the challenge; and we fought everything the enemy threw at us.

On May 24, 1943 at Camp Haan, Riverside, California under the command of Major Ralph S. Johnson the 125th Coast Artillery Battalion (A.A.) (Gun) (Mbl.) was activated; and on June 28th it was officially redesignated the 125th A.A.A. Gun Bn. (Mbl.). Thus it was, that with a cadre of « non-coms » from the 205th Coast Artillery Regiment (A.A.) of Santa Monica, our battalion came into existence. Actually, things didn't begin to hum until the middle of July when the « fillers », the recruits, the rookies started to pour in to Camp Haan from Fort Hayes, Ohio; Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana; Fort Thomas, Kentucky; and Enlisted Cadre Pool, Camp Haan.

Looking backward to those early weeks in camp it seems like a darn long time ago. The memory of those first days is a jumbled picture of orders : to « fall in », « fall out », « dress it up », « right face », « sound off », « quiet down », « at ease ». They kept us in a whirl all right, and we didn't have too much time to think about home, or the good old civilian days.

Remember those classes they used to give us out in the battery streets or in the « rec » hall, those orientation movies, the countyfair down in the gun park, or better yet those milk shakes and ice cream we got at the P. X. in the evening.

Our training commenced July 26, 1943 and continued until January 15, 1944. During this period we were to be changed from raw recruits into soldiers; from green civilians into G. I. Joes. We learned about our rifles, our gas masks, our big guns, and our range equipment. We went on problems at Camp Irwin; we dug emplacements in the alkali soil of the Mojave Desert; and at the West Range we fired our «nineties and fifties» at towed sleeves. We slept in pup-tents, took our 25 mile hike around Bicycle Lake, took salt-tablets in our drinking water, ran through obstacle courses, climbed down the debarkation net, and sweat out the infiltration course where everyone expected to meet at least a dozen rattle snakes along the way.

Major Myron T. Fleming assumed command of the battalion on October 4th and on October 18th he was followed by Lieut. Colonel Lester M. Kilgarif.

Undoubtedly the highest spot during our whole training period was the furloughs we all received in November. Most of us got home for Thanksgiving. Boy, oh boy, how the time flew by; and what a time we all had. It was really tough having to come back to camp. The only compensation was the fact that while the folks back home were deep in winter, we, at least, had California weather to enjoy. No wise-cracks either!

Those were the days of week-end passes to Los Angeles, Hollywood, Santa Monica, and those gay times at Ocean Park and Venice Pier. And let's not forget the «Battle of Barstow».

With our «basic» completed it was time to move to greener pastures. So after a short period at Topside, of packing and loading of equipment onto flat cars we pulled out of Camp Haan on the afternoon of February 16, 1944. Train convoys are always the same: groups of soldiers playing black-jack, reading magazines, or just looking out of windows. And after four days of this sort of thing we arrived the Louisiana Maneuver Area, down among the pines, to take part in the war games. We engaged in two phases of these maneuvers. One phase we were in the Red Army and for the other we were in the Blue Army. Such names as Hornbeck, Toro, and Leesville recall scenes of dusty roads, crowded streets, and the rough and tumble life in those small Louisiana towns.

Fortunately for us we had only a short time of this life and on March 8th we returned to garrison and Camp Livingston, La. Without a doubt it was the best camp at which we were ever stationed. With its bowling alleys, pool tables, roller skating rink, and excellent theaters there was very little need to leave camp for entertainment. It was a pleasant camp in the Spring. All this helped to relieve the unpleasantness of those inspections we kept having in preparation for our overseas movement.

We were told we could take only «such-and-such», and «this-and-that». We had to fall out in the battery street with sack, pack, and duffle-bag; dressed in O. D.'s with blouse and leggings; and carrying rifle and gas mask. In other words you fell out with every damn thing you owned and expected to take with you. We got used to it after a time, but it surely seemed like «grab-bag» to us just then. And it really kept our pores working double-time.

We left Livingston April 22nd, going by train to Camp Myles Standish, Mass., staging area. Arriving there on the 25th we had every reason to believe that our stay would be short. We were all «hopped-up» to ship out and after a couple of days at Myles Standish we were hoping it would come soon. Something «snafued», however, for we didn't ship out. Orders were cancelled and on May 4th we took a short jaunt down to Cape Cod and Camp Edwards; and to Triple ATC. As was to be expected they set up a schedule for

us : exercises, infantry drill, tracking missions, a malarial control problem, and good old aircraft identification.

Lieut. Colonel James D. Land assumed command of the battalion on May 15, 1944.

After almost losing hope of ever getting another furlough in the States, we finally received one for the last two weeks of May. Sweet memories!

A month later, June 30, the big day came. With all our duffle and equipment we rode into Boston and without much ceremony boarded our ship, the Mount Vernon.

When the day of embarkation arrived we met the occasion with mingled thoughts and feelings. By the time we steamed out of Boston Harbor on July first we were too engrossed with the prospects of our future to realize how much in the months ahead we would long for the sights and sounds of home. We took the trip in our stride, and when our stomachs settled down we enjoyed ourselves as best we could.

We docked at Liverpool on July 8th, and sweating under the weight of our full field packs and duffle bags, left the boat. We proceeded by train to our staging area at Blackshaw Moor near the town of Leek, in Staffordshire. Here we had our first taste of English ale and bitters. Well, it wasn't so bad after all, come to think of it. If you drank enough you'd feel it. And then there were the people. Everything they did seemed amusing at first : the way they talked, dressed, and lived. But in a short time we even failed to take much notice of these differences. And by the time we convoyed down to the Channel coast we were beginning to feel more at home.

The people of London and Southern England will never forget the summer of 1944, for they were beginning to hear the dreaded throbbing of the flying-bombs and the killing crash they made as they tore through rows of dwellings. The Germans were launching their new weapon from the coast of France across the English Channel. Nor will the English ever forget the great anti-aircraft battle which took place all along the coast facing the launching sites of the enemy.

Those early days, our first taste of action, those mental pictures we have of the « divers » coming toward us, our hearty acceptance of the task assigned, and the superb job we did in helping to defeat the « robots » are the especial pride of every man in the battalion.

Let's take, for example, an average engagement. Over the advance warning line comes the initial plots signifying a « robot » is on its way. This is the call to action. Plotting room men go into the business assigned to them; the radar crew is ready; the men are set on the tracking head; and the men on the guns stand-by. Like the nose of a hunting dog, the radar seems to sniff the air for the scent of its quarry; the parabola stops; « they must have something »; sure enough, over the phone comes the familiar call : « radar on target ».

From then on that buzz-bomb's time is limited. You hear the whine of the gun's motors; the crews are ready; « ammo » is set; now just let it get into range.

The boys on the tracker-head have the bomb dead center on the cross hairs. It's a sight that always brings a thrill. A dark streamlined bomb with blunt wings and a lurid blast of orange flame jetting out behind it. It's like something you'd expect to read about in a story of the future. It's some insidious monster destined for the wholesale destruction of mankind. But you know damn well there's no imagination about all this. It's an actuality up there. And its hellbent on murder, so everyone is a bit grim about the whole business. There's very little noise now, no unnecessary talking or action. But up there you hear the

low throbbing drone; then nearer and louder it comes. The noise vibrates in the air around you.

Men are watching dials; hands are steady on controls; the target is in range; now's the time.

« Guns, fire ». Wham! The explosion smacks you squarely. The crews on the guns are working with a rhythm. The « ammo » is passed; the fuze is cut; the shell goes into the breech; and the gun is fired. The projectile's on its way. You watch for bursts. « There they are », just a bit behind the target. The next are close. « Darn good », you say. « Okay, how's this! » There's a terrific burst of yellow flame in the sky. It lights up the area, and in several seconds the concussion reaches you and jars you. It makes the earth shake and it whips the tents. That's real shooting! It's another score for the 125th!

To say, merely, that we were credited with destroying 269 targets during the anti-aircraft defense of London is to fail in telling of the work that was necessary to make this great score possible. It doesn't tell of the endless hauling of ammunition and food; of the keeping of countless records; of the miles of wire that had to be strung; or, of the perpetual state of alertness by every man on the job. Buzz-bombs are a far cry from the towed sleeves we used to bang away at out on the West Range, yet our efficiency, accuracy, and ability to operate as a team stems from this training.

One thing none of us needed much training in, however, was an approach to the English girls. It was just a question of taking over. And if memory serves rightly it can be stated that the girls, both civilian and service, really took to the ack-ack boys. They came to our dances, and we went to theirs. Pass night and the names of towns such as Lydd, New Romney, Ashford, Folkestone, and Dymchurch will linger long in the memory of the G. I.'s and their sojourn in England. Or, who will forget the trips to London; the historic sights of the great capital under war time conditions; or, who didn't, just for the sake of « seeing things », take a stroll down to Piccadilly Circus after dark.

But business elsewhere called us. The great attack of the flying bombs was ended, and it wasn't long before we received « march order ». We were pulling stakes for new fields to conquer. We left our positions in the Romney Marshes the morning of September 20, 1944 and convoyed all day, arriving at Southampton, our shipping port. We were moving to the Continent.

On September 23rd we landed at Omaha beach-head. After a rather hectic crossing on the Liberty ships and L. S. T.'s, we were darn glad to hit dry land and bed down on some solid ground. Here we were in Normandy amid the scenes of the great battles of the invasion. We saw towns smashed to ruins. Evidence of the mighty push that started the Allies on their way to Berlin lay on every roadside : shattered tanks and vehicles, signs warning about the mine fields, and the constant stream of Army equipment rolling toward the front. Soon our own motor pools would be working for the Red Ball Express, hauling the vital supplies and personnel from the docks of Cherbourg and the beach heads to the front. But first they were to take us to Cherbourg where, on the hills overlooking the great port, we set up the batteries for anti-aircraft defense. This proved to be rather « dry stuff » for us, with no action, especially after the buzz-bombs; and it was with relief that we heard the call to move again. Everyone had a rumor about where we were going and everyone was quite certain that we were headed for action.

We moved on October 18th and convoyed down the Normandy peninsula, swung southward to pass below Paris, and then turned northward to learn in due time that we

were headed for Belgium to take part in the defense of Antwerp against our old enemy the flying-bomb. Upon arrival on October 23rd, the batteries were located near the towns of Kessel and Nylen, northeast of Lierre. After digging in and sand bagging, passes were handed out, and the fellows weren't long in acquainting themselves with the Belgian people. We were one of the first American battalions to move into this part of Belgium and they received us exuberantly. Who can forget the reactions of the people when we passed through Brussels and Antwerp! It is interesting to note that the battalion gave the first benefit dance for the buzz-bomb victims of Belgium and Holland.

Every soldier in the E. T. O. will remember the Christmas of 1944. For it came just a week after the Germans began their counter offensive which was to develop into the Battle of the Bulge. On the morning of December 19th a hurried « march-order » was given and we pulled out of positions for destinations unknown. By evening we were down at Liege and it was apparent that we were headed for the hot spots. The Germans were pouring buzz-bombs into Liege and it was at this time that A Battery suffered its tragedy when a diver crashed into its convoy, killing twelve men.

Nightfall found us east of Liege, near the Fort of Embourg, a remnant defense of World War I. Some of the men were picked to stay here and guard equipment, while the gun crews and the machine gunners and everyone who could be spared went on ahead to the mission we had been given. Our assignment was to protect certain highways against the advance of German tanks. There we built our positions, five or six miles from the enemy, without any supporting troops. Helping to make the situation as completely miserable as possible we had to endure drenching rain and bitter cold.

In a few days a large force of Yanks moved into our area and we were relieved of this mission.

The battalion then returned to an anti-aircraft mission near the front, where we were continually on the alert against hostile planes. We all had a good taste of winter here, with lots of snow. Incidentally a « quiet » New Year's Eve was spent at this position.

Before long we were moving again. On January 11, 1945 we convoyed back to positions very near to the ones we had left before the antitank mission. We were back at the old job again : shooting down the « robots ». We moved again on February 6th, this time to Holland, to meet the pilotless aircraft coming from a new direction. Headquarters was located in a school at Oud-Gastel and the gun batteries in positions near the towns of Roosendaal and Bergen-op-Zoom. Here the job of sand bagging the equipment was speeded a bit by the employment of Dutch civilians.

To meet the changing direction of flights of the flying bomb we moved once again on March 9th, but on March 12th we returned to areas near Roosendaal. Oh, the trials of a mobile battalion! In nine months spent in the E. T. O. we have moved nine times.

Each move meant digging in and sand bagging. Pictured in terms of shovelfulls of earth, or of sandbags filled it's been a lot of « oh, my aching back! » Then, add to the picture the fact that we've expended 75,000 rounds of « ammo »; changed tubes on our guns four times; and to date have been credited with destroying 750 bombs. In the diver gun belt in England we were the first American battalion to fire at the robots. Our machine gunners were the first to experiment with their M51 mounts against the buzz-bombs. Twice we have killed two targets simultaneously on one firing course; once in England and once in Holland. We're the buzz-bomb boys all right. We've seen them by the hundreds and we feel as if we know enough about them by this time to say that as long as the enemy sends them over we'll be « on target » to knock'em down.

